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American Catholics and Mexican Anticlericalism, 1933-1936

BY E. DAVID CRONON

The Roman Catholic Church has been a powerful force in Mexico since the days of Hernán Cortés and the Conquest. Much of recent Mexican history, in fact, is incomprehensible without an understanding of both the historical influence of the Church and the rising determination of Mexican secular leaders to wrest from it some of its great power.¹ After Mexico achieved its independence in 1822 anticlericalism tended to become a staple element of Mexican politics, and throughout the nineteenth century a series of governments, most notably that of President Benito Juárez in the 1850's, sought with varying success to whittle down the special privileges and political and material power of the clergy. But the most serious challenge to the Church came with the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in 1910. The men who rose to power through the Revolution were passionately determined to limit drastically the clergy's influence over the life of the nation. The new Mexican Constitution adopted in 1917 frankly aimed to drive the Church out of politics and to restrict it to narrowly defined religious functions. Among other restraints, it authorized the state legislatures to set limits on the numbers and activities of priests in each locality and declared that primary education should henceforth be secular in character and under strict government control.

Leaders of the Church could hardly be expected to let the new Constitution go unchallenged and their opposition to its religious provisions was made plain from the first. In 1926 during the administration of President Plutarco Elías Calles the simmering conflict erupted into the so-called Cristero Rebellion, and for the next

¹ It is not the purpose of this article to discuss either the state of the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico or the wisdom of various governmental religious policies. Rather the focus is on American Catholic reactions to Mexican anticlericalism.

three years government and clerical extremists were responsible for sporadic outbreaks of violence. Although the advantage lay with the government, the Church was not without important outside support, for ever since the beginning of the Revolution of 1910 Catholics in the United States had watched the developments in Mexico with mounting concern. Indeed, Catholic resentment of President Wilson's Mexican policies had been a factor of some importance in the American national elections in 1916, and throughout the 1920's American Catholics had continued to keep an anxious eye on Mexico. The Cristero Rebellion, with its bloody excesses on both sides, inflamed Catholic opinion in the United States and led to American efforts to end the religious controversy. In April, 1928, the Reverend John J. Burke, a prominent American priest known for his liberal social views, conferred secretly with President Calles at Veracruz in an attempt to mediate the dispute, and the following year an uneasy peace was arranged with the quiet support of American Catholic leaders and United States Ambassador Dwight W. Morrow.

But the Church was still very much on the defensive. A number of Mexican states, exercising their powers under the Constitution, passed laws severely limiting the number of priests and making it all but impossible for them to function. Moreover, the central government continued its drive to expand the public schools and secularize Mexican education. It was evident that despite the 1929 settlement anticlericalism remained a potent force in Mexico and at the same time a factor potentially disruptive of good relations with the United States, for events since the Revolution had demonstrated that any serious Church-State dispute in Mexico was bound to have important repercussions above the Rio Grande.

Such a dispute arose during the 1930's to plague Mexican-American relations and test the Good Neighbor policy of Franklin D. Roosevelt. In fact Roosevelt had not yet moved into the White House when the American Catholic bishops issued a strong protest "against the sustained persecution of the Church in Mexico," thus providing a warning that not all of the new President's problems would concern domestic matters.² When shortly after his inauguration President Roosevelt appointed his good friend and former chief Josephus Daniels as ambassador to Mexico, some American

² *Catholic Action* (Washington), XV (February, 1933), 5.

Catholics used the occasion to remind the administration of the religious tension in Mexico. In a long open letter to Ambassador Daniels, the Jesuit weekly *America* vividly described “the present horrors” facing Mexican Catholics and pointedly recalled Ambassador Morrow’s recent efforts to persuade the Mexican government to ease its pressures against the Church. “In any case the precedent exists,” *America* informed Daniels, “and if you go about it the right way, in the name of common humanity, you can confer a service on mankind.”³

Although he was not a Catholic, the new United States Ambassador to Mexico was a deeply religious man with a long record of opposition to intolerance and religious persecution. In spite of the heavy demands involved in editing his daily newspaper, the *Raleigh News and Observer*, for over a quarter of a century Josephus Daniels had found time every Sunday to give Bible lessons to successive classes of North Carolina boys. The Ambassador was a staunch Methodist but he nevertheless had great respect for the differing religious views of others. And unlike many southern Protestants, he was in no sense anti-Catholic. Indeed, as Woodrow Wilson’s Secretary of the Navy he had increased the number of Catholic chaplains in the Navy and had raised a Catholic officer, Captain William S. Benson, to be Chief of Naval Operations. During the 1920’s Daniels had shown his devotion to religious freedom by crusading against the Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina, and at the Democratic national convention in 1924 he was one of the tiny handful of southerners who supported a resolution condemning the Klan. Furthermore, he had campaigned actively for Alfred E. Smith in the presidential election of 1928, knowing full well that support of the Roman Catholic nominee would hurt his newspaper’s influence and circulation in dry, Protestant North Carolina. American Catholics therefore had good reason to suppose that Ambassador Daniels would view with distaste any evidence of religious persecution at his new post. One priest assured Daniels that his “breadth of Christian charity” was “enough for me to understand your feeling in regard to things un-Christian in Mexico.”⁴

Still, the extreme sensitivity of American Catholics to the position

³ Wilfrid Parsons, “An Open Letter to Ambassador Daniels,” *America* (New York), XLVIII (April 1, 1933), 618-19.

⁴ Patrick R. Duffey to Josephus Daniels, April 18, 1933, Josephus Daniels Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress).

of their beleaguered coreligionists in Mexico indicated that Ambassador Daniels' past record would be no guarantee of immunity from criticism. American Catholic editors watched Daniels closely from the moment he crossed the Rio Grande, and in fact his first official words in Mexico brought a pained and angry outcry. In presenting his credentials to Mexican President Abelardo L. Rodríguez, Daniels politely remarked that Americans had "deep admiration for your marked advance in social reform, in public education . . . and in all measures which promote the well-being of your nationals."⁵ For this rather perfunctory praise the Ambassador was roundly rebuked by the Catholic press back home. One of the strongest critics, the influential Baltimore *Catholic Review*, bluntly asserted that Daniels "does not know what he is talking about," and declared that his ill-considered words merited "the condemnation of everyone who is familiar with conditions in our neighboring republic."⁶ Several of the Ambassador's Catholic friends arranged to kill a hostile dispatch about the incident sent out by the news service of the National Catholic Welfare Conference and saw to it that his remarks on freedom of religion a few months later were well publicized. But one of them nevertheless advised Daniels to "go rather slowly for, to be frank, it is my thought no matter what you say you are going to be criticized by some of these editors."⁷

Although the brief flurry over his initial praise of Mexican social reform had demonstrated the concern of American Catholics over religious conditions in Mexico, neither Ambassador Daniels nor his superiors in Washington wanted to involve the United States in any Church-State controversy. As the man who had ordered the United States Navy to take Veracruz in 1914 Daniels had ample reason to reflect on the unhappy difficulties involved in trying to help Mexicans settle their domestic disputes. "The Republic of Mexico belongs to the people of Mexico," he reminded a North Carolina Catholic shortly after his arrival in Mexico City. "We cannot enforce our views upon them and of course we would not permit them to enforce their views upon us."⁸

By words and deeds, however, Ambassador Daniels tactfully tried to show his personal interest in religious freedom. From their

⁵ Josephus Daniels, *Shirt-Sleeve Diplomat* (Chapel Hill, 1947), 519.

⁶ Baltimore *Catholic Review*, April 28, 1933.

⁷ Patrick H. Callahan to Daniels, July 28, 1933, Daniels Papers.

⁸ Daniels to J. P. B. Connell, July 15, 1933, *ibid*.

first Sunday in Mexico he and Mrs. Daniels set an example by regularly attending the Union Evangelical Church in Mexico City, and in his first Fourth of July address to the American colony the Ambassador pointedly observed that freedom of religious worship was one of the cornerstones of American liberty. But although Daniels did not hesitate to confer with Archbishop Pascual Díaz, the Primate of Mexico, and other Mexican Church leaders, he nevertheless firmly declined to intervene in Mexican religious matters. To an officer of the National Catholic Welfare Conference in Washington who urged that he mediate the Church-State dispute he replied: "At this time there is nothing an official could do."⁹ Daniels' determination to stay clear of the touchy religious controversy led one Mexican priest to declare with both respect and admiration: "You are an old fox, you know the game; you tell your jokes and say nothing."¹⁰

The struggle between Church and State in Mexico had by 1933 developed into a contest over two major issues: the critical problem of how many priests and churches were to be permitted to function, and the equally critical question of who was to control Mexican education. The most obvious persecution, as Catholics saw it, was the restriction or outright ban on religious activities in some of the Mexican states. But of even greater import to the hierarchy, which had to shape long-term Church policy, was the government's determination to secularize education, traditionally the domain of the Catholic Church. Ever since the Revolution a succession of Mexican administrations had waged war against the nation's shockingly high rate of illiteracy, greatly expanding the public school system and in the process implementing the constitutional restrictions on the activities of religious schools.

Mexican Catholics were understandably aroused, therefore, over the educational provisions of the Six Year Plan drawn up by the ruling National Revolutionary party late in 1933. Intended as a manifesto for the coming presidential election, the Six Year Plan promised a federal program to build six thousand new schools by 1940 and declared that primary and secondary education must be exclusively under government direction and must be non-religious and socialistic in character.¹¹ Catholics were not reassured, more-

⁹ Daniels to William F. Montavon, August 16, 1933, *ibid.*

¹⁰ Josephus Daniels Diary, September 11, 1933, *ibid.*

¹¹ Partido Nacional Revolucionario, *Plan sexenal del P. N. R.* (Mexico City, 1934), 84-85.

over, by some of the inflammatory speeches made by leading Mexican politicians during the election campaign in the summer of 1934. In a speech at Durango late in June General Lázaro Cárdenas, the presidential candidate of the government-sponsored National Revolutionary party, vowed: "I shall not permit the clergy to intervene in any manner in the education of the people."¹² A few weeks later at Guadalajara former President Calles, the dominant figure in Mexican politics, demanded that the government eradicate the hostile influence of the clergy and the conservatives in Mexican schools. "We must now enter into and take possession of the minds of the children, the minds of the young," Calles warned, "because they do belong and should belong to the Revolution."¹³ Late in July, after General Cárdenas' sweeping victory at the polls, a government commission presented a report calling for the amendment of the Constitution to purify Mexican education by prohibiting church schools or the teaching of religious dogmas.¹⁴

The upsurge of anticlericalism in Mexico in the summer of 1934 brought swift repercussions north of the Rio Grande. Conditioned to acute sensitivity by earlier Mexican attacks against organized religion, American Catholics reacted angrily to the latest effort to emasculate the influence of the Church. The Jesuit weekly, *America*, for years a watchdog over Mexican religious developments, reprinted parts of General Calles' Guadalajara speech and declared: "There is now no longer any doubt at all, if there ever was any, that it is the determined design of General Calles and the military dictatorship of which he is the boss to crush out every vestige of religion from the Mexican people."¹⁵ The liberal lay journal *Commonweal* bluntly described the recent antireligious proposals as "the last turn of the screw" and warned General Calles that this time he would "find more opposition in the United States."¹⁶

Already aroused by the anticlerical overtones of the Mexican presidential campaign, particularly the attacks on religious schools, American Catholics were consequently shocked when they learned

¹² *El Nacional* (Mexico City), June 22, 1934.

¹³ Quoted in "Ambassador Daniels 'Explains,'" *America*, LI (September 22, 1934), 554-55.

¹⁴ *New York Times*, July 26, 1934.

¹⁵ "Struggle for Mexican Youth," and "Dark Days in Mexico," *America*, LI (August 18 and 25, 1934), 456, 459.

¹⁶ "The Last Turn of the Screw," and "Education in Mexico," *Commonweal* (New York), XX (August 24 and 31, 1934), 395-96, 417.

somewhat belatedly that on July 26 Ambassador Daniels had publicly praised Mexican educational progress. Worse yet, he had paid tribute to Benito Juárez, the leading anticlerical of the nineteenth century, and General Calles, the prime mover of the current drive to secularize Mexican schools. And worst of all, he had singled out for quotation a passage from Calles' recent anticlerical speech at Guadalajara. Speaking at an embassy reception for members of Professor Hubert Herring's annual American Seminar, Daniels had commended the American system of tax-supported free public schools. Public education, he declared, was the only sure way to bring knowledge to all, and he complimented the present Mexican leaders for recognizing this fact:

General Calles sees, as Jefferson saw, that no people can be both free and ignorant. Therefore, he and President Rodríguez, President-elect Cárdenas and all forward-looking leaders are placing public education as the paramount duty of the country. They all recognize that General Calles issued a challenge that goes to the very root of the settlement of all problems of tomorrow when he said: "We must enter and take possession of the mind of childhood, the mind of youth." That fortress taken, the next generation will see a Mexico that fulfills the dream of Hidalgo, Juárez, Madero and other patriots who loved their country.¹⁷

Although Daniels' remarks were directed to a group of visiting Americans — none of whom considered them exceptional or offensive — and although he had expressed similar views back home for forty years without causing so much as a ripple of comment, he soon discovered that in Mexico his speech was both indiscreet and unwise. Mexican Catholics, some of whom read a published English version of the address the next day,¹⁸ were quick to resent the Ambassador's apparent interference in the struggle between Church and State. The small but vociferous Catholic newspaper *El Hombre Libre* of Mexico City indignantly protested Daniels' alleged support of a government campaign "to uproot from the mind of childhood, from the mind of youth a belief in God and to convert our children into atheists and materialists even against the wishes and protests of parents."¹⁹ And though the surprised Ambassador hastened to point out that he was praising only universal education, not any particular kind of instruction, and that he had not seen all

¹⁷ Josephus Daniels, "Seminar Address," July 26, 1934, Daniels Papers.

¹⁸ *El Universal* (Mexico City), July 27, 1934.

¹⁹ José María Rodríguez to Daniels, in *El Hombre Libre* (Mexico City), August 3, 1934.

of General Calles' remarks, *El Hombre Libre* kept the issue alive for nearly a month before accepting Daniels' explanation.²⁰

The interval was long enough to insure that Ambassador Daniels' blunder would not be overlooked by Catholics in the United States. The well-intentioned but somewhat naïve Seminar address now became a convenient means by which American Catholics could enter the Mexican Church-State controversy with some hope of arousing non-Catholic opinion in the United States and perhaps forcing action by the American government. *America* led the way late in August by denouncing as "shameful" Ambassador Daniels' endorsement of "the tyrannous designs of Calles upon the children of the nation" and vowing: "If this was actually Mr. Daniels' intention — and it will be verified — then the very least our own Government can do is to recall him; and this Review, at least, will not rest until he is recalled."²¹ A week later the editor of *America* had made up his mind, though without consulting Daniels as to his actual intention. "Daniels Should Resign!" proclaimed *America* in a leading editorial on September 1. "Ambassador Daniels did say the words attributed to him, and they show that he is no longer capable of representing the American people in Mexico."²²

Most other Catholic papers did not at first demand the Ambassador's head. After contacting Daniels the news service of the National Catholic Welfare Conference sent out a story on the incident that included a fair statement of his intent, though its effect was partially offset by the stress put on *America's* demand that he resign.²³ The Baltimore *Catholic Review*, diocesan organ of Mexico-conscious Archbishop Michael J. Curley, contented itself with a wry expression of sympathy for President Roosevelt because he did not have "an Ambassador in Mexico who 'knows what it is all about,'" but at the same time it thoughtfully made the White House aware of its solicitude.²⁴

²⁰ Daniels to Rodríguez, August 11, 1934, Daniels Papers; *El Hombre Libre*, August 6, 13, 15, 17, and 20, 1934. Daniels, who knew no Spanish, always maintained that he had not seen all of Calles' Guadalajara speech, only the sentence quoted, and thus was not aware of its general anticlerical character. Even if this explanation is accepted, however, the Ambassador's remarks to the Seminar were indiscreet, for the names of both Juárez and Calles were anathema to devout Catholics, especially in connection with a matter affecting the interests of the Church.

²¹ "Dark Days in Mexico," *America*, LI (August 25, 1934), 459.

²² "Daniels Should Resign!" *ibid.*, LI (September 1, 1934), 483-84.

²³ Denver *Catholic Register*, September 16, 1934.

²⁴ Baltimore *Catholic Review*, September 21, 1934.

As the debate in the Mexican Congress throughout September and October, 1934, showed that the government was determined to push through a constitutional amendment abolishing religious education, Catholics in the United States anxiously began to demand action to save the Church in Mexico. Largely as a result of the political developments in Mexico, American Catholics stepped up their attacks both on Ambassador Daniels and on official Washington's hands-off attitude. "What detestable cowardice on the part of the official representative of the mighty nation to the North," fumed one indignant priest, "to jump with both feet upon the weak children of a nation that is being harassed to death in its religious belief and practice by a persecutor that compares favorably with a Nero and a Stalin."²⁵ Late in September the Holy Name Union of Richmond voted unanimously to censure Ambassador Daniels and to send copies of the rebuke to President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull. A few days later the National Council of Catholic Women sent to the White House a similar resolution deploring Daniels' approval of Mexico's antireligious school system.²⁶

Even in the Ambassador's home town, where his true feelings concerning religious freedom were widely known, his indiscretion came in for sharp criticism. In his Sunday sermon on October 6, Bishop William J. Hafey said he hoped Daniels had quoted General Calles only "thoughtlessly and unintentionally," but he nevertheless termed the action a "serious error" that warranted Catholic appeals to President Roosevelt "to deny this interpreted endorsement of Communistic Atheism in Mexico."²⁷ Several North Carolina newspapers expressed shocked surprise at this attack on a man who in the past had offended Protestants in the state by his liberal views toward the Roman Catholic faith,²⁸ but the incident demonstrated how seriously some Catholics were now viewing the developments in Mexico.

By mid-October the angry tone and growing volume of protests against Ambassador Daniels' alleged support of Mexican religious persecution had reached such proportions that the administration

²⁵ Joseph H. Wels to the Editor, *America*, LI (September 22, 1934), 573.

²⁶ Baltimore *Catholic Review*, October 5, 1934; Agnes G. Regan to Franklin D. Roosevelt, October 23, 1934, Franklin D. Roosevelt Papers (Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park).

²⁷ Raleigh *News and Observer*, October 8, 1934.

²⁸ Greensboro *Daily News*, October 18, 1934; Winston-Salem *Journal*, October 6, 1934.

in Washington could no longer ignore the situation. At his press conference on October 17, President Roosevelt was asked whether he intended to recall Daniels as a result of the furor, but he merely referred reporters to the State Department and dismissed the question with an airy wave of his hand, saying that the complaints sounded "fishy" to him.²⁹ The State Department could not evade the question so easily. That same day Undersecretary of State William Phillips telephoned Daniels in Mexico City, explaining that there had been "a little flurry in the press the last day or two," and "in view of the political strength" involved, he believed the Department should attempt to clarify the Ambassador's position.³⁰ Shortly after receiving Daniels' permission, Phillips called a press conference and read to reporters the Ambassador's statement emphasizing his profound belief in "the principles of our country with reference to public schools, the freedom of religion and the freedom of the press." The Undersecretary indicated that the State Department planned no further action in the matter, and reiterated in an off-the-record statement the administration's fervent desire to keep clear of entanglement in foreign church problems.³¹ Phillips' remarks and the Daniels statement were given wide press coverage in the United States and Mexico, and a number of secular newspapers expressed the hope that the misunderstanding could now be forgotten, because, as the *Dallas News* explained, "Ambassador Daniels has so kindly a heart that he would be the last man to arouse intentionally religious animosity."³²

But many American Catholics were in no mood to be mollified. The Mexican Congress was still debating the drastic antireligious amendment to the Constitution, and by making Daniels' blunder a *cause célèbre* Catholics saw a chance to focus American attention on the drive against their coreligionists in Mexico. Far from forgetting the incident, some Catholics continued to misinterpret and magnify it out of all proportion. *Commonweal's* rather uncharacteristic reaction to the Phillips press conference, for example, was to charge that Ambassador Daniels had addressed "the Seminario, the official directors of Calles' educational storm troopers," and to sug-

²⁹ Presidential Press Conference 151, October 17, 1934, Roosevelt Papers.

³⁰ Transcript of conversation, October 17, 1934, Daniels Papers.

³¹ Memorandum of press conference, October 17, 1934, Records of Department of State.

³² *Dallas News*, October 19, 1934.

gest that his remarks, if not officially repudiated, foreboded similar antireligious treatment in the United States under the New Deal.³³ The journal *Ave Maria* was darkly certain that had the Mexican persecution involved Protestants Ambassador Daniels would not have been "so carefree in his approval of Calles and his henchmen," and that if he had been, he would have been recalled.³⁴ Probably the low point of the press attacks on Daniels was reached by *Our Sunday Visitor*, a widely circulated midwestern Catholic weekly:

As American Ambassador, Mr. Daniels is unfit to represent America any longer in Mexico. He has publicly given expression to opinions that are un-American and an insult to twenty millions of his fellow citizens. He has shown by his public utterances that he does not possess the slightest comprehension of the Mexican situation. He has given the judas kiss of friendship to the enemies of Christ. . . . He has heard the cry, "Crucify her, Crucify her," and he has clapped his hands.³⁵

Even the American hierarchy, at its annual meeting in mid-November, issued a thinly veiled reprimand plainly intended for Ambassador Daniels. "We cannot but deplore," declared the bishops, "the expressions, unwittingly offered at times, of sympathy with and support of governments and policies which are absolutely at variance with our own American principles. They give color to the boast of the supporters of tyrannical policies that the influence of our American Government is favorable to such policies."³⁶

The Ambassador's mail now grew heavy with rebukes and personal abuse — often anonymous and scarcely printable — and the White House and the State Department were flooded with petitions and protests. By December the volume of mail to the State Department had become so heavy, and seemed so largely the result of organized propaganda efforts, that Secretary Hull told his staff not to bother to acknowledge most of it.³⁷ Over the next six months the Department received more than ten thousand communications dealing with the Mexican religious controversy, many of which were petitions bearing a number of signatures. One mammoth petition was signed by twenty thousand persons. Two thirds of the cor-

³³ "The New Deal and Mexico," *Commonweal*, XX (October 26, 1934), 599-600.

³⁴ "Contrasts and Inconsistencies," *Ave Maria* (Notre Dame), New Series, XL (November 10, 1934), 600-601.

³⁵ *Our Sunday Visitor* (Huntington, Ind.), January 20, 1935.

³⁶ *New York Times*, November 17, 1934.

³⁷ Edward L. Reed to Salmon, December 4, 1934, State Dept. Records, file no. 812.404/1366.

respondents demanded the removal of Ambassador Daniels and most of the rest favored some other form of American protest against Mexican religious persecution.³⁸

Ambassador Daniels was also roundly denounced by Catholic speakers at a series of protest rallies. Monsignor Hugh L. Lamb told the Philadelphia Holy Name Union that Daniels was a "consummate jackass" for approving of Mexico's "socialistic and communistic educational program."³⁹ By relying more on emotion than reason, the famed radio priest, the Reverend Charles E. Coughlin, managed to link Daniels, Woodrow Wilson, President Roosevelt, American oil concessionaires, and Moscow in what he termed "the rape of Mexico." Father Coughlin reminded his large radio audience that in 1914 Wilson and Daniels had run "the guns in for the mobsters and . . . won the dirtiest revolution this world has ever known." It was not surprising, therefore, that Daniels was now "practically" telling the Mexicans that "Americans are Communists and haters of Christ."⁴⁰

This unfair and exaggerated criticism of Ambassador Daniels was only one aspect, however, of a developing campaign by some American Catholics to aid the Church in Mexico by applying economic, political, and even military pressure from above the Rio Grande. This campaign, though never very effectively organized or co-ordinated, was waged on a number of fronts under both clerical and lay leadership. Daniels remained a useful whipping boy, but the leaders of the Catholic agitation in the United States also raised their sights to larger goals. A few extremists began to denounce the administration for allegedly maintaining an arms embargo that one officer of the Knights of Columbus charged was actually "a form of intervention" favoring the godless Mexican government.⁴¹ "If the embargo on arms were lifted," the chancellor of the archdiocese of Philadelphia told a rally, "and rifles put in the hands of the majority, Calles and his band of minions would be blown to smithereens."⁴² The Reverend Michael Kenny, an Ameri-

³⁸ Reed to Sumner Welles, March 27 and May 3, 1935, *ibid.*, file no. 812.404/1650½. Of the mass of communications, only twenty-seven defended Daniels' support of public education.

³⁹ *New York Times*, December 3, 1934.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, December 24, 1934.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, December 3, 1934. See also *ibid.*, February 6, 15, and 19, 1935; Charles H. Dillon to the Editor, *Commonweal*, XXII (May 3, 1935), 21-22.

⁴² *New York Times*, December 3, 1934.

can Jesuit active in the crusade to defend Church interests in Mexico, complained to a State Department official that Mexico was ripe for a revolution, but that its potential supporters were discouraged because they were sure the United States would support the existing government.⁴³ In June, 1935, Ambassador Daniels informed President Roosevelt that the embassy had received reports of secret arms shipments from the United States to clerical rebels in Mexico, and although Daniels discounted the possibility of a successful uprising, he noted that at least two American bishops had voiced sharp criticism of the arms embargo.⁴⁴

Fortunately for Mexican-American relations and, for that matter, for Mexican Catholics, most Catholics in the United States rejected force as a means of aiding their coreligionists. One journal reminded the extremists that "the weapons of our Catholic faith are prayer and the Sacraments, not rifles and long-range guns."⁴⁵ And although the hierarchy was plainly divided as to the kind of action American Catholics should take in the Mexican dispute, the bishops reiterated their 1926 stand opposing armed intervention.⁴⁶

If forceful measures were impractical, there remained other ways to put pressure on Mexico. Catholic students picketed the Mexican consulate in New York in protest against alleged religious atrocities.⁴⁷ From New York to Spokane Catholic groups organized a generally fruitless boycott of Mexican goods, with leaders of the boycott movement hinting broadly that unco-operative merchants would be picketed if they continued to handle Mexican products.⁴⁸ One of the better organized boycott groups, the Friends of Catholic Mexico, even asked various Latin American envoys in Washington to indicate which of their country's exports to the United States might be labeled as to origin, evidently to avoid confusion with Mexican products. The organization also called upon Americans to abstain from liquor or the movies for one year or until relief had been secured for Mexican Catholics.⁴⁹ The economic drive against

⁴³ Edward L. Reed, Memorandum of conversation, January 5, 1935, State Dept. Records, file no. 812.404/1416.

⁴⁴ Daniels to Roosevelt, June 28, 1935, Daniels Papers.

⁴⁵ "Crusade of Prayer for Mexico," *Ave Maria*, N. S., XL (December 22, 1934), 790.

⁴⁶ *New York Times*, November 17, 1934.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, November 16 and 24, 1934.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, November 24, 28, December 1, 10, 1934; *Truth* (Raleigh-New York), XXXIX (July, 1935), 3-4.

⁴⁹ Robert W. Hull to Dr. Don Enrique Bordonave, April 3, 1935, State Dept. Records, file no. 812.404/1666; Hull to the Editor, *Commonweal*, XXI (December 28, 1934), 258-59.

Mexico also took the form of urging American tourists not to travel in that country.⁵⁰ The Catholic press bristled at reports of a proposed visit to Mexico by President Roosevelt during the summer of 1935, and the outcry was sufficient to persuade the administration that for the moment at least any such trip would be politically unwise.⁵¹ The anti-tourism drive was not always so successful, however. Despite heavy Catholic pressure, including resignations of some prominent members, Rotary International refused to cancel plans to hold its 1935 annual convention in Mexico City.⁵²

The drive to aid Mexican Catholics also quickly assumed a political character. Although Mexico had not been a significant issue in the congressional elections of 1934, Catholic congressmen soon joined in the general denunciation of Mexican religious policies. In mid-December Representative John P. Higgins, a newly elected Democrat from Massachusetts, called upon the President to intervene in the Mexican dispute.⁵³ One of Higgins' first acts after the new Congress convened was to introduce a resolution demanding the recall of Ambassador Daniels and the withdrawal of diplomatic recognition of Mexico.⁵⁴ "Ambassador Daniels' actions, during recent months," the irate Catholic Congressman told Roosevelt, "is an indictment of every principle of honor and decency that America has stood for during the past one hundred and fifty years and warrants his immediate removal."⁵⁵ Catholic papers generally applauded the Higgins move, but the secular press was decidedly unenthusiastic. The Louisville *Courier-Journal*, for example, soberly warned that "few things could be more injurious to Catholicism in America than the prosecution of such charges."⁵⁶ The administration made plain, however, that it contemplated no change in either its Mexican envoy or its Mexican policy. Secretary of State Hull cautioned Higgins that his proposal would almost certainly provoke such Mexican resentment as to defeat his purpose, and President

⁵⁰ New York *Times*, November 24, 1934, May 26, 1935.

⁵¹ Daniels to Roosevelt, February 1 and 19, 1935; Roosevelt to Daniels, February 9 and March 1, 1935, Daniels Papers. For a sample of Catholic opinion see "Mexican Itineraries," *Ave Maria*, N. S., XLI (February 23, 1935), 246-47.

⁵² E. S. Miller to Daniels, March 11, 1935, Daniels Papers; New York *Times*, May 18, 1935.

⁵³ John P. Higgins to Roosevelt, December 19, 1934, State Dept. Records, file no. 812.404/1408.

⁵⁴ New York *Times*, January 9, 1935.

⁵⁵ Higgins to Roosevelt, January 15, 1935, Roosevelt Papers.

⁵⁶ Louisville *Courier-Journal*, January 9, 1935.

Roosevelt told him that his interpretation of Ambassador Daniels' conduct was "as unjust as it is unwarranted by the facts."⁵⁷

"You must not worry if you hear that some member of Congress proposes some drastic action with reference to our relations with the Mexican Government," Assistant Secretary of State Walton Moore advised Daniels early in January. "All sorts of remarkable proposals are, of course, going to be made and with no result beyond some little ineffective discussion."⁵⁸ Moore's prophecy proved to be accurate, for throughout January, 1935, the political pressure increased. New York's influential Democratic (and Catholic) Senator Robert F. Wagner put on record a series of resolutions framed by Knights of Columbus groups demanding that the United States sever trade and tourist relations with Mexico.⁵⁹ Catholic groups in Massachusetts petitioned Congress for action, and the New York State senate sent a resolution to Washington urging that the United States condemn the Mexican government's religious policies.⁶⁰ On January 21 a delegation of the national leaders of the Knights of Columbus, headed by Supreme Knight Martin H. Carmody, conferring in Washington with Secretary Hull, demanded a blunt warning to Mexico that diplomatic relations would be broken unless "persecution and murder" of Catholics ceased.⁶¹

Ten days later Senator William E. Borah startled his colleagues and the nation by introducing a resolution calling for a Senate investigation of religious conditions in Mexico to determine whether the rights of American citizens were being violated.⁶² The political importance of this move was underscored by the fact that Borah was a Protestant, the ranking Republican member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and a statesman of national prominence. Catholics were of course jubilant that a non-Catholic of Borah's stature had enlisted on the side of the Church in Mexico. Some observers were struck, however, by certain aspects of the Idaho Senator's sudden interest in Mexico. For one thing, Borah did not

⁵⁷ Cordell Hull to Higgins, December 23, 1934, State Dept. Records, file no. 812.404/1408; Roosevelt to Higgins, January 23, 1935, Daniels Papers and Roosevelt Papers.

⁵⁸ R. Walton Moore to Daniels, January 7, 1935, Daniels Papers.

⁵⁹ *Cong. Record*, 74 Cong., 1 Sess., 246-47 (January 10, 1935).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 680 (January 21, 1935); 1296-97 (January 31, 1935).

⁶¹ Martin H. Carmody to Cordell Hull, January 21, 1935, State Dept. Records, file no. 812.404/1475; *New York Times*, January 22, 1935.

⁶² Senate Resolution 70, *Cong. Record*, 74 Cong., 1 Sess., 1298 (January 31, 1935); *New York Times*, February 1, 1935.

have many Catholic constituents, nor had he previously paid much attention to the Mexican religious controversy. He was, moreover, one of the country's leading isolationists and for years had battled to keep the United States out of foreign disputes. In fact only two days before he introduced his Mexican resolution Borah had led a successful fight to block Senate approval of United States participation in the World Court. It seemed a little odd, therefore, that he should now become, as the *New York Times* put it acidly, "a screaming eagle of intervention in the domestic affairs of another nation."⁶³ Capitol Hill buzzed with rumors that the Borah resolution was a political pay-off for powerful Catholic support in defeating the World Court proposal.⁶⁴

Whatever the motivation, Borah's proposal soon drew heavy fire. The *Milwaukee Journal* spoke for a number of secular newspapers when it asked pointedly: "What manner of Americanism is it that preaches 'isolation' when the other nations concerned are something like our size, but is ready for any degree of meddling with a small neighbor?"⁶⁵ A number of Protestant groups went on record against the resolution, including the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, the National Council of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and the board of foreign missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church.⁶⁶ At Senator Borah's office the volume of protest mail rivaled his heavy Catholic support, and some of the opposition came from old and respected friends. For example, Professor Edwin M. Borchard of the Yale Law School, the Senator's long-standing adviser on international law and a recent visitor to Mexico, warned of the dangerous implications of the proposed investigation. He told Borah: "The appeal to 'human rights' in Mexico should be taken with a grain of salt, for so far as I was able to discover, the persecution consisted not in denying persons the right even to attend Church if they wished, but the disability of Church dignitaries to under-

⁶³ *New York Times*, February 2, 1935.

⁶⁴ Jonathan Daniels to Josephus Daniels, February 8, 1935, Daniels Papers. The William E. Borah Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress) do not resolve this question of a possible political trade in connection with the World Court proposal. They do show, however, that Borah's interest in Mexican religious conditions began only at this time and that Senator David I. Walsh, a Catholic Democrat from Massachusetts, had a hand in persuading Borah to introduce his Mexican resolution. See Carmody to Borah, January 31, 1935, Borah Papers.

⁶⁵ *Milwaukee Journal*, February 2, 1935.

⁶⁶ *New York Times*, February 14, 22, and March 2, 1935; press releases, Daniels Papers.

mine the state by their hold upon ignorant Indians and others.”⁶⁷

In Mexico the opposition to Borah's proposal was virtually unanimous. *El Hombre Libre*, the Catholic paper that had helped set off the furor by publicizing Ambassador Daniels' Seminar address, indignantly rejected any United States interference. “We earnestly beg our sympathizer,” it said, “to leave us alone in our task of remedying the evils which assail us.”⁶⁸ And the Primate of Mexico, Archbishop Díaz, was reported to have asserted privately that any United States intervention like that proposed by the Borah resolution “would be very injurious to the interests of the Church in Mexico.”⁶⁹

Actually, Borah's demand for a Senate investigation of Mexico never resulted in more than what Assistant Secretary of State Moore had predicted would be “some little ineffective discussion.” In firm control of a Democratic Congress that was, after all, more interested in solving domestic economic problems, the Roosevelt administration kept the resolution effectively bottled up in committee. “I have from the outset been giving every attention to the defeat of the Borah resolution,” Secretary Hull assured Daniels in mid-February.⁷⁰ Hull virtually disposed of the matter when, with President Roosevelt's approval, he advised the friendly chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that there was no substance to Borah's charges and that his proposal was “unwise from every point of view.”⁷¹ And although throughout the following year Catholic groups made repeated attempts to secure action on the resolution, Senator Borah himself seemed to lose interest and never tried to force a vote on his measure.

The Borah resolution was only one of a number of congressional efforts to intervene in the Mexican religious dispute. As Catholic pressures mounted, other congressmen sought to aid Mexican Catholics by calling loudly and often belligerently for action by the United States. Representative John J. Boylan of New York told the House on February 5, for example, that five thousand residents

⁶⁷ Edwin M. Borchard to Borah, February 5, 1935, Borah Papers.

⁶⁸ *El Hombre Libre*, February 8, 1935. For other adverse comment in the Mexico City press see *Excelsior*, February 2 and 3, 1935; *El Universal*, February 3, 1935; *El Nacional*, February 2, 3, and 4, 1935; *La Prensa*, February 2, 3, and 5, 1935; *La Palabra*, February 3 and 6, 1935.

⁶⁹ Stephen E. Aguirre, Memorandum of conversation, April 13, 1935, Daniels Papers.

⁷⁰ Hull to Daniels, February 19, 1935, *ibid.*

⁷¹ Hull to Key Pittman, February 12, 1935, Roosevelt Papers and Borah Papers.

of Mexico City had recently been kidnapped or murdered because of their opposition to the government, an assertion that seemed unsubstantiated outside the American Catholic press. "That country is today unsafe for American visitors," Boylan declared.⁷² Three days later a debate on the general subject of Mexico degenerated into noisy confusion, with Representative William P. Connery of Massachusetts shouting over heated objections from southern Democrats that Ambassador Daniels favored communism and was "co-operating with the tyrants of Mexico to enslave the Mexican people."⁷³ "What can have happened," asked the shocked *New York Times* after this outburst, "to turn a kindly and benevolent man, as we all knew Josephus Daniels to be, into an enemy of democracy and humanity?"⁷⁴ Over the next several months Catholic congressmen repeated their charges, with a few going so far as to attack the President himself. In a widely circulated speech entitled "Red Mexico," Representative Clare G. Fenerty of Pennsylvania asserted that President Roosevelt "knows Americans have been murdered in Mexico, but smiles and plays Pollyanna while men and women die and little children suffer in body and soul."⁷⁵

Throughout the first six months of 1935 no less than fourteen resolutions were introduced in the House of Representatives demanding some kind of action with respect to the Mexican situation. Like the Borah resolution in the Senate, most of them called for an investigation of religious conditions, but two explicitly asked the recall of Ambassador Daniels and one directed the Secretary of State to demand freedom of religion in Mexico.⁷⁶ At the same time Catholic lobbyists were successful in getting the state legislatures of New York, Illinois, Massachusetts, and Arizona to petition Washington for action.⁷⁷ The high point of organized political action came in July, when a delegation of congressmen visited the White House and presented President Roosevelt with a petition signed by 250 members of the House of Representatives requesting

⁷² *Cong. Record*, 74 Cong., 1 Sess., 1485-89 (February 5, 1935); *New York Times*, February 6, 1935.

⁷³ *Cong. Record*, 74 Cong., 1 Sess., 1745-59 (February 8, 1935); *New York Times*, February 9, 1935.

⁷⁴ "Maligning a Good Man," *New York Times*, February 9, 1935.

⁷⁵ *Cong. Record*, 74 Cong., 1 Sess., 6420-33 (April 25, 1935); *New York Times*, April 26, 1935.

⁷⁶ 74 Cong., 1 Sess., House of Representatives: Joint Res. 311; Concurrent Res. 3, 7, 8, 12, 17, and 28; Res. 70, 179, 194, 277, 282, 283, and 286.

⁷⁷ *New York Times*, February 28, March 6, 7, and 17, 1935.

an official investigation of the religious rights and facilities available to American citizens in Mexico. Strangely, the two Catholic leaders of the delegation declared in an explanatory memorandum that "the committee is unalterably opposed to any semblance of interference or intervention in Mexico."⁷⁸

As with the Borah resolution in the Senate, the Roosevelt administration set itself firmly but quietly against similar agitation in the House of Representatives. The harassed chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Representative Samuel D. McReynolds, declared privately that despite heavy Catholic pressure, he did not intend to take action on the various resolutions before his committee.⁷⁹ Nor was the President particularly responsive to Catholic appeals. When he met with the sponsors of the congressional petition for an investigation of Mexican religious conditions, for example, he declined to do more than issue a re-affirmation of the American belief in religious freedom. With much of his New Deal currently running into heavy fire from the courts and from right- and left-wing critics, it is easy to understand Roosevelt's preoccupation with domestic economic problems as well as his desire to avoid unnecessary foreign controversy. It was evident that he preferred to take a calculated political risk at home in order to avoid any impression in Latin America that the United States was abandoning the new Good Neighbor policy. The President was convinced, moreover, that there were more effective methods of persuasion than congressional investigation and name-calling. "I have had a talk with the Knights of Columbus people and a number of others who wish to 'resolve,' start conferences, etc., etc.," he wrote Daniels at the height of the uproar. "I think they see the danger to Catholics and to future relations if we Yankees start telling the Mexicans what to do."⁸⁰

But a number of Americans, shocked by the lurid descriptions of Mexican conditions in the Catholic press, angrily rejected the President's hands-off policy, and some threatened political reprisals if

⁷⁸ John P. Higgins and Clare G. Fenerty to Roosevelt, July 16, 1935, Roosevelt Papers. See also *New York Times*, July 17, 1935. There is evidence that not all Catholic members of Congress approved of this move, even though they felt obliged to sign the petition. See Edward L. Reed, Memorandum of conversation with John B. Daly, June 30, 1935, State Dept. Records, file no. 812.404/1724.

⁷⁹ Samuel D. McReynolds to Daniels, April 6, 1935, Daniels Papers. See also *New York Times*, January 23, 1935.

⁸⁰ Roosevelt to Daniels, July 12, 1935, Daniels Papers.

the administration did not act to clean up Mexico. "If you don't do something," one Catholic warned Ambassador Daniels, "you will find out in the next election what will happen."⁸¹ Archbishop Michael J. Curley charged at a rally in Washington that President Roosevelt was personally responsible for blocking an investigation of the Mexican situation. "Twenty million American Catholics are getting pretty tired of the indifference shown by the Administration," he declared ominously.⁸² In Congress, Representative Fenerty demanded to know how long the President expected Catholic patience to last: "If, as a statesman, he will not think of human rights, let him, as a politician, think of the next election."⁸³

That the Mexican religious controversy might be used politically against the administration in the elections of 1936 was a disturbing possibility, and it worried Democratic party leaders, Catholic and non-Catholic alike. Some of the opposition could be explained on simple political grounds, for many of the most violent attacks came from Catholics who were either anti-administration Democrats or active Republicans like the bellicose Representative Fenerty. Father Coughlin's ardor for the New Deal had begun to cool long before he questioned the President's Mexican policy. The hostility of Bishop Francis C. Kelley of Oklahoma, one of the most outspoken clerical critics, was also neither recent nor confined to Mexican matters. "He always has been a Republican," one Catholic Democrat reported, "so that his criticism of the President is based primarily on political lines."⁸⁴ Democrats found it significant that several of the top leaders of the Knights of Columbus, the influential and highly critical national organization of Catholic men, were active in the Republican party. In fact the character of the opposition led one apprehensive Democrat, who was also a devout Catholic, to warn that "the Catholic Church and Catholics have been used by the conservative forces not only in other countries but our own country as well."⁸⁵

Throughout 1935 and 1936, in spite of a noticeable lessening of religious tension in Mexico, some American Catholics sought to keep the Mexican issue alive in the United States. Of the persistent

⁸¹ John Mitchell to Daniels, November 27, 1934, *ibid.*

⁸² *New York Times*, March 26, 1935.

⁸³ *Cong. Record*, 74 Cong., 1 Sess., 6429 (April 25, 1935).

⁸⁴ Michael Francis Doyle to Daniels, October 10, 1936, Daniels Papers.

⁸⁵ Patrick H. Callahan to Daniels, March 6, 1935, *ibid.*

critics, Martin H. Carmody, the conservative Republican head of the Knights of Columbus, was perhaps the most active, though it seemed obvious to some of his coreligionists that he was, as one put it, "simply playing politics."⁸⁶ Carmody was a devoted advocate of the advertising technique later to be known on Madison Avenue as the "hard sell." An editorial in *Columbia*, the national magazine of the Knights, advised: "Before we can get any action on our Mexican protests, we must first get attention and there is one thing that will get it. A scene. Lots of scenes. Loud, repeated scenes."⁸⁷ Long after many American Catholics had lost interest in Mexico — right up to the eve of the 1936 elections, in fact — Carmody and the Knights of Columbus were still making scenes. The Knights were careful to win maximum publicity for their attacks against the administration's Mexican policy. Late in 1935, for instance, Carmody released to the press even before it was received at the White House the text of a long protest letter to President Roosevelt:

You cannot escape responsibility for throttling the Borah Resolution. You cannot escape responsibility for the endorsement given to the Mexican Government and its policies by your Ambassador to that country. You cannot escape responsibility for failure and refusal to follow the long line of precedents founded upon established American principles. You cannot escape responsibility for non-action on behalf of bleeding and oppressed Mexico.⁸⁸

A later communication from an official of the Knights moved James A. Farley, the Democratic national chairman and a Roman Catholic, to advise a White House aide: "Frankly, I don't think it should be answered by the President or you. This crowd in New Haven has been terribly discourteous and I wouldn't bother with them at all."⁸⁹ During the spring of 1936 Carmody made a series of speeches around the country attacking both Ambassador Daniels and the President, and in late August, as the political campaign got under way, the annual convention of the Knights adopted a lengthy resolution criticizing the administration and especially Ambassador Daniels for encouraging "the Mexican tyrants to continue their tyrannous policies."⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Doyle to Daniels, March 10, 1936, *ibid.*

⁸⁷ "Is It Fun to Be Fooled?" *Columbia* (New York), XIV (April, 1935), 12.

⁸⁸ Carmody to Roosevelt, October 25, 1935 (press release), Borah Papers; New York Times, October 28, 1935.

⁸⁹ James A. Farley to Marvin H. McIntyre, March 25, 1936, Roosevelt Papers.

⁹⁰ *Columbia*, XVI (October, 1936), 8-9.

The continued Catholic attacks against the Roosevelt administration worried most Democratic leaders, but they disturbed no one more than Josephus Daniels, a loyal party man from the time he cast his first vote for Grover Cleveland in 1884. The Ambassador knew that he was the victim of misunderstanding and perhaps calculated misinterpretation, but he also realized that he was now clearly a political liability to the President. Convinced, however, that he did not deserve the violent abuse of his detractors, Daniels was reluctant to resign under fire, at least without presenting some plausible excuse. While home on leave in the summer of 1935, at the height of the attacks upon his work in Mexico, the Ambassador seems to have discussed with President Roosevelt the possibility of quitting his post. Over the next few months he considered the matter further, eventually concluding that he could leave Mexico without too much loss of face if he resigned to run for the Senate from North Carolina. This possibility was especially appealing to Daniels, because if he won he would replace Senator Josiah W. Bailey, a conservative Democrat who had opposed many New Deal measures. He might thus be of service on two fronts. But after several months of increasingly frantic consultation with Roosevelt and other party leaders, Daniels decided in the end to ride out the storm in Mexico. For one thing, he could get no clear indication from the President what the administration would like him to do. Roosevelt admitted he would like to see his old friend in the Senate where his liberal views could aid the New Deal, but he also declared he would hate to have Daniels make the race unless he were certain of being elected. And in view of Senator Bailey's reported strength and the administration's obvious unwillingness to take sides in a close primary fight, the Ambassador concluded it would be inadvisable to enter the campaign.⁹¹

Daniels continued to express concern about the political effects of the attacks against him, however, and he left open his offer "to resign at any time rather than permit my presence here to be a weakness to our ticket in November."⁹² He bombarded Roosevelt and other administration leaders with suggestions as to patronage and other means of counteracting the Catholic opposition, warning es-

⁹¹ For details of Daniels' protracted indecision, see E. David Cronon, "Josephus Daniels as a Reluctant Candidate," *North Carolina Historical Review* (Raleigh), XXXIII (October, 1956), 465-82.

⁹² Daniels to Roosevelt, undated draft [February, 1936], Daniels Papers.

pecially against any intemperate replies to the critics. Active in every national campaign since 1896, the Ambassador was delighted when Farley suggested that he come home in September to help with the campaigning, and he laid plans for an aggressive speaking tour.⁹³ But after further reflection, apprehensive party leaders decided to keep their controversial Mexican envoy safely out of the country and the campaign. "Have conferred with White House and Jim Farley and conclusion is reached that possibility of matters arising which would call for urgent attention by you," Secretary Hull told Daniels abruptly in a code telegram. "Suggest that for the present it would be best for you to remain there."⁹⁴ Since there was nothing urgent calling for attention in Mexico, this cryptic message required further elaboration, which Hull supplied somewhat apologetically a few days later. "The extreme partisan republicans, especially in the K. of C.," he explained, "are watching every pretext to foment the religious situation."⁹⁵

Democratic leaders can hardly be blamed for worrying about the political effect of the Catholic criticism, for they were receiving conflicting reports from Catholic Democrats across the country, some of whom went so far as to write off the party's chances in the heavily Catholic northeastern states.⁹⁶ Yet in retrospect their fears seem rather ludicrous in light of President Roosevelt's smashing triumph on November 3. Indeed, the landslide victory was so complete that the President himself jubilantly described it to a relieved Daniels as "baptism by total submersion" — adding as an afterthought, "The other fellow was the one who nearly drowned."⁹⁷ The election results indicated that there was no easily identifiable Catholic vote in 1936, and that Catholics, like other Americans, were more interested in their own pressing social and economic problems than in a foreign religious dispute.

There are several reasons why Mexico's religious troubles were not a more significant factor in the 1936 American elections. In the

⁹³ Farley to Daniels, July 27, 1936; Daniels to Sam Rayburn, August 24, 1936, Daniels Papers.

⁹⁴ Hull to Daniels, September 12, 1936, *ibid.*

⁹⁵ Hull to Daniels, September 18, 1936, *ibid.*

⁹⁶ Callahan to Farley, October 10, 1936, *ibid.*; J. L. Murphy to Roosevelt, August 27, 1936, Roosevelt Papers. On the other hand, a Philadelphia Catholic declared shortly before the election, "I have not met one Roman Catholic who is refusing to support President Roosevelt because of his Mexican policy." Doyle to Daniels, October 21, 1936, Daniels Papers.

⁹⁷ Roosevelt to Daniels, November 9, 1936, Daniels Papers.

first place, by the time Americans went to the polls religious conditions had clearly begun to improve in Mexico, and Catholic agitators found it difficult to sustain public interest in what appeared to be a dying issue. After his inaugural in December, 1934, Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas quickly demonstrated that he was much more determined to push land reform than to harass Roman Catholics. Six months after taking office he broke with the anticlerical General Calles, the once formidable iron man who in the past had been able to make and break Mexican presidents at will. Cárdenas thereafter dropped from his administration some of the leading anticlericals and used his influence to bring about a gradual relaxation of the more extreme restrictions in some of the states. Unquestionably the Church was still forced to operate under serious limitations, but by 1936 it was equally plain that organized anticlericalism was declining, and consequently the Mexican religious issue was of decreasing importance to Catholics in the United States. Yet it seems reasonable to assume that had the elections taken place some eighteen months earlier, at the height of the uproar, Roosevelt would have lost some votes, or perhaps would have been forced to modify his stand against United States intervention.

Ironically, Josephus Daniels, the man whom many American Catholics held personally responsible for Mexican anticlericalism, actually played an important but little appreciated part in bringing about the new climate of moderation. Maligned and misunderstood at home, throughout the bitter controversy Ambassador Daniels frequently went far beyond his authority or official interest in attempting to ease the religious dispute. Unfortunately, sometimes his quiet efforts were completely misinterpreted by overzealous critics in the United States, as when he was condemned for a visit to the influential General Calles in November, 1934. Actually, the sole purpose of his visit was to persuade Calles to call off the current drive against the Church.⁹⁸ More than most of his critics, Daniels was aware of the delicate and precarious nature of his role in easing Mexican religious tensions, and he once explained to a Vatican representative that "anything but the most discreet approach was apt to produce a feeling of interference and therefore the opposite result from that desired."⁹⁹ The Ambassador therefore refused to

⁹⁸ Daniels to the Secretary of State, November 5, 1934, *ibid.*

⁹⁹ Daniels to Sumner Welles, August 12, 1936, *ibid.*

make any public defense of his actions, even seeking to prevent the Methodist Conference in the United States from passing a resolution expressing confidence in his work.¹⁰⁰

Daniels recognized that the Cárdenas administration, like its predecessors, was determined to maintain government control over education, but he was hopeful that it might relax the restrictions on religious worship. "My thought has been to quietly convince the authorities," he told President Roosevelt after the Cárdenas-Calles break, "that the first thing to do is to permit churches to be opened and priests to officiate in those states where churches are now closed. That is the most important step."¹⁰¹ Working alone, or on occasion with Frank Tannenbaum, a Columbia University professor who was a close friend of President Cárdenas, Daniels repeatedly prodded Mexican officials to permit free religious worship, sometimes arguing on broad moral grounds, other times stressing Mexican world prestige, occasionally referring to the political pressures against the Roosevelt administration in the United States. But although the Ambassador was keenly alive to the political dangers of Catholic criticism at home, his interest in religious liberty in Mexico was both genuine and deep. Nowhere was this better demonstrated than on the occasion of the death of Archbishop Pascual Díaz in May, 1936. Mexican law prohibited religious processions in the streets, but Daniels had known and liked the Primate, and his intercession with government officials won permission for a funeral procession so that the service could be held in the cathedral.¹⁰² "Mexicans do not have a government which listens to them," declared the Catholic paper *El Hombre Libre* afterward. "The Government listens more to Mr. Daniels, and the Mexicans, as a result, are protected by Mr. Daniels."¹⁰³

In addition to the improved conditions in Mexico, another reason why the religious dispute was not a more important issue in the 1936 American elections was that Catholics in the United States

¹⁰⁰ Daniels to Daniel C. Roper, February 25, 1935, *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Daniels to Roosevelt, July 23, 1935, *ibid.*

¹⁰² Daniels to Eduardo Hay, May 20, 1936, *ibid.*; Daniels to the Secretary of State, May 26, 1936, State Dept. Records, file no. 812.404/1892; Daniels, *Shirt-Sleeve Diplomacy*, 148-50.

¹⁰³ *El Hombre Libre*, May 24, 1936. Unfortunately, few American Catholics ever learned of the Ambassador's action, though when one priest did, nearly a year later, he wrote humbly to apologize for ever having doubted Daniels' Christian devotion. John L. Bazinet to Daniels, March 9, 1937, Daniels Papers.

were by no means in agreement as to the proper American policy toward Mexico. "I was mighty glad to see that the President sat down upon Martin Carmody," one Catholic told a White House aide after Roosevelt had rebuffed a Knights of Columbus appeal for intervention. "The President is right and we have no business to be interfering in other countries."¹⁰⁴ After visiting Mexico a writer in *Commonweal* advised American Catholics "to place some confidence in President Cárdenas," for "if we follow a policy of 'hands off' (and tongues also) for a time, the Church will greatly benefit."¹⁰⁵ Far from being the monolithic structure that is a part of the folklore of many non-Catholic Americans, the Church in this instance exhibited a number of divergent points of view, and a number of prominent Catholics, laymen and clergy alike, cooperated with the Roosevelt administration to head off or undercut the most extreme Catholic attacks.

Of the friendly Catholic leaders, the Reverend John J. Burke, the able head of the National Catholic Welfare Conference in Washington, was perhaps the most helpful. Father Burke had the confidence of administration leaders, and throughout the long controversy he was in close touch with White House and State Department officials. He apparently was the authorized representative of the Vatican in his negotiations with American government leaders, though on several occasions his moderate leadership seems to have been challenged by more belligerent Church leaders.¹⁰⁶ Although the administration did not always accept Father Burke's advice — it declined to tell the Mexican government that the United States was interested in a proposed mediation effort by the Vatican, for example¹⁰⁷ — he was especially useful in suggesting how the White House should handle the extreme Catholic critics. Once when Bishop John F. Noll of Fort Wayne wrote the President demanding a strong statement in support of religious liberty lest it be "difficult to keep the Catholics quiet if the Catholic hierarchy . . . is completely ignored,"¹⁰⁸ the canny Roosevelt merely referred

¹⁰⁴ W. W. Durbin to Marvin H. McIntyre, November 20, 1935, Roosevelt Papers.

¹⁰⁵ Ralph Adams Cram, "A Note on Mexico," *Commonweal*, XXIV (May 22, 1936), 91.

¹⁰⁶ William Phillips, Memorandum of conversation with John J. Burke, April 13, 1935, State Dept. Records, file no. 812.404/1670; Martin T. Manton to Roosevelt, July 11, 1935, Roosevelt Papers; Doyle to Daniels, July 2, 1935, Daniels Papers.

¹⁰⁷ Edward L. Reed to Sumner Welles, November 7, 1934, State Dept. Records, file no. 812.404/1337½.

¹⁰⁸ John F. Noll to Roosevelt, May 13, 1935, Roosevelt Papers.

the letter to Father Burke for suggestions as to a suitable reply. Roosevelt was so pleased with his tactful draft that he accepted it without change, and thus the letter the unsuspecting bishop duly received over the presidential signature was actually written by another priest!¹⁰⁹

Other ranking clerics also showed their understanding of the administration's problems. The Reverend John F. O'Hara, president of the University of Notre Dame and an authority on Latin America, spoke out publicly against any American interference in the Mexican Church-State controversy. "Anything like an attempt at intervention by the United States in the internal affairs of Mexico," he said in December, 1934, "would be distasteful to all Latin American nations, and would result in more harm than good."¹¹⁰ Later when Catholic extremists were threatening political reprisals because the Roosevelt administration had failed to take a strong stand against Mexico, Father O'Hara and his ecclesiastical superior, Cardinal George W. Mundelein, pointedly ignored strenuous objections from some Catholic sources and bestowed an honorary degree upon President Roosevelt. In fact Cardinal Mundelein used the occasion to declare that the Church was not in politics and that no individual or group could speak for it in political matters.¹¹¹ Similarly, when the Knights of Columbus severely criticized the President in October, 1935, Archbishop John T. McNicholas of Cincinnati informed Catholics under his jurisdiction that the Knights "in no sense" spoke for the priests or laity of his diocese.¹¹² Of the members of the American hierarchy, Cardinal Mundelein was clearly the most sympathetic to the administration. It was doubtless no accident that his diocesan newspaper was the only important Catholic publication to caution against demands for Ambassador Daniels' recall — "a dubious redress even for an aggravated wrong."¹¹³ Cardinal Mundelein's support was of great help in the 1936 elections, and Roosevelt declared afterward that he had been "perfectly magnificent all through the campaign."¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ See Roosevelt to McIntyre, May 16, 1935; John J. Burke to McIntyre, May 20, 1935; Roosevelt to Noll, May 23, 1935, Roosevelt Papers.

¹¹⁰ *New York Times*, December 6, 1934.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, December 5 and 10, 1935.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, November 4, 1935.

¹¹³ "A Dubious Victory," *Chicago New World*, January 18, 1935.

¹¹⁴ To show his gratitude, the President gave enthusiastic support to Cardinal Mundelein's proposal for the establishment of a seminary in Texas to train Mexicans for the priesthood. In fact he asked Ambassador Daniels "without mentioning it in

A number of Catholic laymen also disapproved of the stand of the extremists, and some of Ambassador Daniels' Catholic friends expressed dismay and shame over the way his actions were distorted to serve clerical ends. "I want to say that I have been literally 'burned up' at the ravings of some of our Catholic editors," complained one. "Ambassador Daniels . . . is one of the finest, most sincere and greatest Americans we have today in America."¹¹⁵ A North Carolinian assured Daniels that the Catholics of his home state did not believe he had done anything "to justify the unwarranted attacks made upon you."¹¹⁶ The indefatigable Colonel Patrick H. Callahan of Louisville, like Daniels an old Bryan Democrat and temperance leader, was worth a small army in combating the criticism of his friend. A respected Catholic layman who had been decorated by the Pope, Callahan was well known in Church circles and throughout the furor kept up a vast correspondence, circulating copies of some of his letters to some 1,500 prominent American Catholics. In expressing his disgust over the misrepresentations of the Ambassador's conduct in Mexico, he said on one occasion: "If he were the direct representative of the Holy Father and on the payroll of the Vatican he could hardly do all the things that some of the Catholics in this country want him to do in Mexico."¹¹⁷ After reading Daniels' famous Seminar speech the Colonel told a friend: "It is my thought there is nothing in this address but what I would have said myself under the same circumstances."¹¹⁸ Callahan delighted in offering hundred dollar bonuses or items of clothing to errant Catholic editors if they could back up their wild charges. To one particularly flagrant offender he promised an overcoat "if you will show me where Ambassador Daniels 'Blames the Church' for the conditions in Mexico," and raged: "As a builder of prejudices against Catholics I think you are entitled to a Pulitzer Prize for this year."¹¹⁹

Other Catholics worked more quietly but none the less effectively to keep the Mexican conflict from damaging the political position any way to the State Department" to sound out the Mexican government discreetly to see if the seminary might be located in Mexico City. Roosevelt to Daniels, November 9, 1936, Daniels Papers.

¹¹⁵ Francis W. Durbin to Callahan, December 20, 1934, Daniels Papers.

¹¹⁶ G. G. Herr to Daniels, February 23, 1935, *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Callahan to J. A. O'Brien, September 22, 1936, *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Callahan to Barry Bingham, January 14, 1935, Roosevelt Papers.

¹¹⁹ Callahan to Vincent dePaul Fitzpatrick, December 15, 1934, Daniels Papers.

of the Roosevelt administration. Michael Francis Doyle, a Philadelphia Democrat who had been honored by the Vatican for outstanding service to the Church, was greatly upset over religious persecution in Mexico, but he was also determined that it should not be used politically against the Democratic party in the United States. Accordingly, on a number of occasions he spoke out publicly against Catholic attacks on Ambassador Daniels and the administration, and he took an active role in several of the Catholic groups organized to promote Mexican religious liberty, partly to insure, he told the White House on one occasion, "that this movement is not used for political purposes."¹²⁰ William Franklin Sands, a former American diplomat and the Catholic member of a three-man inter-faith delegation that visited Mexico in the summer of 1935 to investigate religious conditions, also co-operated closely with the administration. The group's report was sharply critical of Mexican government policy, but Sands went out of his way to defend the much abused Ambassador Daniels, reporting to the White House on his return:

From Mexican Government officials, in the Foreign Office and elsewhere, we had repeated statements that the Ambassador has never ceased consistently and persistently, to try and bring about a better condition and an ultimate solution of the religious problem. He is well liked by Mexicans and trusted — even by the opponents of the present government. If I may say so, after serving three administrations in those countries, the President could not have a better man in Mexico at this moment. There is not the slightest justification for the attacks on him in the United States, and as the Catholic member of our delegation I would have been glad to say so publicly — if Mr. Daniels had not preferred to let it die.¹²¹

Sands was somewhat surprised to learn, however, that Catholic editors were not interested in his moderate, balanced views on Mexico. "To publish a quiet article," he concluded somewhat ruefully after his return, "would seem like going against some of the persons and groups who believe that you can only sway American public opinion by over-emphasis and over-statement."¹²²

Without access to official Catholic archives or the personal papers of ranking Church leaders, one can only speculate on the extent of the disagreement among American Catholics during the Mexican religious controversy, though certainly the division was largely over

¹²⁰ Doyle to McIntyre, November 27, 1935, Roosevelt Papers.

¹²¹ William Franklin Sands to McIntyre, July 25, 1935, *ibid.*

¹²² Sands to Callahan, August 8, 1935, Daniels Papers.

means rather than ends. There is ample evidence to suggest, however, that the extremists did not speak for all Catholic Americans, and there is reason to believe that a majority of the American hierarchy was anxious to keep the Mexican issue out of the 1936 elections. Both Archbishop Curley of Baltimore and Bishop Kelley of Oklahoma, two of the strongest clerical critics of the administration's Mexican policy, reportedly were instructed not to make any public attacks against either the President or Ambassador Daniels during the political campaign.¹²³ And when Martin Carmody of the Knights of Columbus spoke in Philadelphia in March, 1936, his criticism of Daniels and the administration was omitted from the account published in the local Catholic paper, the organ of Cardinal Denis J. Dougherty.¹²⁴

Although the agitation by American Catholics between 1934 and 1936 did not accomplish its major stated objectives — the recall of Ambassador Daniels and some form of overt action by the United States in the Mexican dispute — the effort can hardly be called a failure. The pressures against the Roosevelt administration made American officials acutely conscious of the situation in Mexico and doubtless led them to take a more active role in quietly persuading the Mexican authorities to call off their campaign against the Church. American Catholics deserve some credit, therefore, for the improved religious conditions in Mexico after 1935. The episode is also of interest because it represented the first sustained attack on President Roosevelt's Good Neighbor policy. By portraying the Mexican Government as atheistic, communistic, and dangerously subversive to American values, the Catholic criticism of these years helped to create an unfavorable American public opinion that not only posed a threat to the Good Neighbor policy but also was to be a great comfort to American oil companies after the expropriation crisis in March, 1938. Yet at the same time the controversy showed that Roosevelt was willing to take a serious political risk in pursuing the new policy of non-intervention and neighborliness in Latin America. Lastly, in all the complicated maneuvering the President is revealed once more as a consummate politician, who recognized the delicacy of the situation and shrewdly took advantage of the divisions among American Catholics to minimize the dangers to his administration.

¹²³ Doyle to Daniels, October 10, 1936, *ibid.*

¹²⁴ Doyle to Daniels, March 10, 1936, *ibid.*